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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001921

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#) [WCAR](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OBASANJO IS READY TO WORK WITH U.S. ON
WCAR

REF: (A) STATE 130883 (B) ABUJA 966 (C) ABUJA 1156

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Per Ref A request, Ambassador met with President Olusegun Obasanjo on July 31 to discuss the WCAR. Other issues raised were Nigeria's role in Zimbabwe and post-JEPC bilateral engagement, both covered in septels. This cable reports on the WCAR discussion.

2. Ambassador Jeter expressed the USG desire to work with Nigeria and emphasized the importance of using Geneva for a constructive dialogue on WCAR. The Ambassador stressed that together we can use this opportunity to lead the international community to confront the scourge of racism. However, he explained, the USG could not participate in WCAR unless there is agreement to remove unacceptable language involving reparations for the slave trade and comparisons between Zionism and racism.

3. (C) President Obasanjo agreed that all forms of discrimination must be condemned and that Zionism cannot be equated with racism. The President emphatically asserted that he would oppose the demand for reparations at the Geneva meeting, calling the concept "complete nonsense." He then described the possible involvement of his own great, great grandfather in assisting slave traders. Pointing to Ambassador Jeter, an African American, he asked rhetorically, &who should be compensated, my great, great grandfather who helped to perpetuate the slave trade, or your great, great, grandfather who was a victim of it.8 Obasanjo argued that reparations to African countries whose forefathers helped to perpetrate these acts is simply "not right". He rhetorically asked how we could expect reparations when even today the slave trade continues in Africa. &Don,t worry. That will not happen,8 he said.

4. (C) Ambassador Jeter noted that the President's position was radically different from that of his representatives in Geneva and in the Foreign Ministry. The President replied that the Nigerian Permanent Representatives in New York and Geneva "did not know my mind before, but now they do." He went on to explain that he had briefed Ambassador Mbanefo at the UN Mission in New York on Nigeria,s position. Asking his Ambassador in Geneva to stand-down, the President had ordered Mbanefo to attend the Geneva meeting to present GON views.

5. (C) Comment. President Obasanjo's position came as a complete surprise. Embassy demarches on this issue thus far have been politely but firmly rebuffed, particularly at the Second United Nations Unit of the MFA (see Refs B and C). While inclusion of language concerning Zionism and racism usually appears less important to Foreign Ministry personnel, they uniformly assert the need for WCAR discussion of reparations and apologies for colonial-era transatlantic slave trading. They become visibly uncomfortable when asked about ongoing trafficking in persons. The most senior official demarched prior to the President offered only that Nigeria could be flexible on the form (increased aid, debt forgiveness, etc.) that "reparations" might take. Our next interaction with our WCAR interlocutors at MFA should be enlightening.

6. (C) Comment continued: Obasanjo's new position on the WCAR is just one more example of foreign policy making at the highest levels of the GON. This is not the first time Obasanjo has turned a policy on its head, leaving us to wonder whether Obasanjo's views have filtered through the bureaucracy. End Comment.
Jeter